

## CLAIMS

1. A method of sharing information, comprising:

defining a stored data set maintained by a first entity to include a locked data set and an unlocked data set; and

5 providing a second entity with access to the stored data set, the second entity having permission to view the locked data set and to change only the unlocked data set.

10 2. The method of claim 1, wherein providing a second entity with access to the stored data set includes providing an application in a computer system with access to the stored data set.

15 3. The method of claim 2, wherein providing an application in a computer system with access to the stored data set includes providing an application maintained at a location external to the first entity with access to the stored data set.

4. The method of claim 2, wherein providing an application in a computer system with access to the stored data set includes providing a computer aided design system with access to the stored data set.

20 5. The method of claim 2, wherein defining a stored data set maintained by a first entity to include a locked data set and an unlocked data set includes defining the locked data set to include information to call the application and the unlocked data set to include data to be used by the application.

25 6. The method of claim 2, wherein defining a stored data set maintained by a first entity to include a locked data set and an unlocked data set includes defining version data for the application as the locked data set and defining raw data for the second entity to look at or use as the unlocked data.

7. The method of claim 1, wherein providing a second entity with access to the stored data set includes sending the data to the second entity.

5 8. The method of claim 1, further comprising providing the first entity with access to the stored data set, the first entity having permission to view the unlocked data set and to change only the locked data set.

10 9. The method of claim 1, wherein providing a second entity with access to the stored data set includes providing a computer aided design system with access to the stored data set.

10. The method of claim 1, wherein providing a second entity with access includes providing an entity that is external to the first entity with access.

15 11. The method of claim 1, wherein defining the stored data set to include a locked data set and an unlocked data set includes assigning data in the stored data set to the locked data set and an unlocked data set based on predetermined criteria.

20 12. The method of claim 1, wherein defining the stored data set to include a locked data set and an unlocked data set further includes defining the stored data set to include a restricted data set including data that is not part of the locked data set or the unlocked data set.

25 13. The method of claim 1, wherein defining the stored data set to include a locked data set and an unlocked data set further includes assigning data to the locked data set based on closeness criteria.

14. The method of claim 13, wherein assigning data to the locked data set based on closeness criteria includes assigning data to the locked data set based on at least one of geometric closeness, organizational closeness, and collective closeness.

5 15. The method of claim 1, wherein defining the stored data set to include a locked data set and an unlocked data set includes assigning data in the stored data set to the locked data set and the unlocked data set based on a function of the second entity.

10 16. The method of claim 1, wherein defining the stored data set to include a locked data set and an unlocked data set includes defining the stored data set to include a locked data set and an unlocked data set for the second entity, the method further comprising:  
defining data included in the unlocked data set for the second entity as locked for other entities.

15 17. The method of claim 16, wherein defining data included in the unlocked data set for the second entity as locked for other entities includes defining data included in the unlocked data set for the second entity as locked for all other entities during a period of time when the second entity has access to the unlocked data set.

20 18. The method of claim 1, further comprising:  
transmitting data from the stored data set to the second entity;  
receiving modified data from the second entity; and  
integrating the modified data corresponding to the unlocked data set into the stored data set.

25 19. The method of claim 1, wherein defining the stored data set to include a locked data set and an unlocked data set includes defining the stored data set to include a locked data set and an unlocked data set based on user input.

20. A method of sharing information, comprising:
  - defining a master data set in a first entity;
  - assigning permissions, including permission to change data, to a subset of data within the master data set based on predetermined criteria;
  - 5 transmitting a copy of the master data set with indications of the permissions to a second entity; and
  - receiving manipulated master data set in accordance with the assigned permissions.
- 10 21. The method of claim 20, further comprising receiving a modified copy of the master data set from the second entity and integrating the modified copy of the master data set with the master data set.
- 15 22. The method of claim 21, wherein receiving the modified copy of the master data set includes receiving additional data.
- 20 23. The method of claim 21, wherein receiving the modified copy of the master data set includes receiving changed data.
24. The method of claim 23, wherein receiving changed data includes receiving data that has been changed in response to design considerations.
- 25 25. The method of claim 20, wherein assigning permissions includes assigning authority to read data.
26. The method of claim 20, wherein assigning permissions includes assigning authority to change data that is a subset of the transmitted copy of the master data.

27. The method of claim 20, wherein assigning permissions includes assigning authority to add data.

5        28. The method of claim 20, wherein assigning permissions includes assigning authority to delete data.

29. The method of claim 20, wherein assigning permissions includes assigning authority to access predetermined types of data within the subset.

10      30. The method of claim 20, wherein assigning permissions includes assigning permissions based on at least one of an identity of an entity, a function of the entity and a user's position within the entity.

15      31. The method of claim 30, wherein assigning permissions based on the user's position within the entity includes assigning permissions according to a hierarchy within the second entity so that a highest ranking member of an entity has a greater number of permissions, and a number and extent of permissions decrease as rank decreases.

20      32. The method of claim 20, wherein assigning permissions includes assigning different permissions for different subsets of the unlocked data.

25      33. A method of sharing information, comprising:  
                receiving, from a first entity in a second entity, a copy of a master data set with permissions for using the master data set, the master data set including locked and unlocked data;  
                modifying the copy of the master data set according to the permissions; and  
                transmitting the modified copy of the master data set to the first entity.

34. The method of claim 33, wherein receiving the copy of the master data set in a second entity includes receiving the copy of the master data set in a computer application.

5 35. The method of claim 34, wherein receiving the copy of the master data set in a computer application includes receiving version information regarding the computer application in the locked data and receiving raw data for manipulation in the unlocked data.

36. The method of claim 33, wherein modifying the copy of the master data set includes performing design processes on the unlocked portion of the data.

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37. The method of claim 33, wherein receiving the copy of the master data set with permissions for using the master data set includes receiving permissions to do at least one of read, change, delete and add data to the unlocked data.

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38. The method of claim 33, wherein receiving the copy of the master data set with permissions for using the master data set includes receiving the copy of the master data set with permissions based on subsets of the unlocked data, with different permissions assigned for different subsets of the unlocked data.

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39. The method of claim 33, wherein receiving the copy of the master data set with permissions for using the master data set includes receiving the copy of the master data set with permissions based on at least one of an identity of the second entity, a function of the second entity and a hierarchy of users within the second entity.

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40. A computer program product, tangibly stored on a computer-readable medium, the computer program product comprising instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to:

define a stored data set maintained by a first entity to include a locked data set and an unlocked data set; and

provide a second entity with access to the stored data set, the second entity having permission to view the locked data set and to change only the unlocked data set.

41. The computer program product of claim 40, wherein the instructions operable  
5 to cause a programmable processor to provide a second entity with access to the stored data set include instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to provide an application in a computer system with access to the stored data set.

42. The computer program product of claim 41, wherein the instructions operable  
10 to cause a programmable processor to provide an application in a computer system with access to the stored data set include instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to provide an application maintained at a location external to the first entity with access to the stored data set.

15 43. The computer program product of claim 41, wherein the instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to provide an application in a computer system with access to the stored data set include instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to provide a computer aided design system with access to the stored data set.

20 44. The computer program product of claim 41, wherein the instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to define a stored data set maintained by a first entity to include a locked data set and an unlocked data set include instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to define the locked data set to include information to call the application and to define the unlocked data set to include data to be used by the application.

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45. The computer program product of claim 41, wherein the instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to define a stored data set maintained by a first entity to include a locked data set and an unlocked data set include instructions operable to cause a

programmable processor to define as the locked data set version data for the application and to define as the unlocked data set raw data for the second entity to look at or use.

46. The computer program product of claim 40, wherein the instructions operable  
5 to cause a programmable processor to provide a second entity with access to the stored data set include instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to send the stored data set to the second entity.

47. The computer program product of claim 40, further comprising instructions  
10 operable to cause a programmable processor to provide the first entity with access to the stored data set, the first entity having permission to view the unlocked data set and to change only the locked data set.

48. The computer program product of claim 40, wherein the instructions operable  
15 to cause a programmable processor to provide a second entity with access to the stored data set include instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to provide a computer aided design system with access to the stored data set.

49. The computer program product of claim 40, wherein the instructions operable  
20 to cause a programmable processor to provide a second entity with access to the stored data set include instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to provide an entity that is external to the first entity with access to the stored data set.

50. The computer program product of claim 40, wherein the instructions operable  
25 to cause a programmable processor to define the stored data set to include a locked data set and an unlocked data set include instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to assign, based on predetermined criteria, data in the stored data set to a locked data set and an unlocked data set.

51. The computer program product of claim 40, wherein the instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to define the stored data set to include a locked data set and an unlocked data set include instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to include a restricted data set including data that is not part of the locked data set or the  
5 unlocked data set.

52. The computer program product of claim 40, wherein the instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to define the stored data set to include a locked data set and an unlocked data set include instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to assign data to the locked data set based on a closeness criteria.  
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53. The computer program product of claim 52, wherein the instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to assign data to the locked data set based on closeness criteria include instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to assign data to the locked data set based on at least one of geometric closeness, organizational closeness, and  
15 collective closeness.

54. The computer program product of claim 40, wherein the instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to define the stored data set to include a locked data set and an unlocked data set include instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to assign data in the stored data set to the locked data set and the unlocked data set based on a  
20 function of the second entity.

55. The computer program product of claim 40, wherein the instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to define the stored data set to include a locked data set and an unlocked data set include instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to define the stored data set to include a locked data set and an unlocked data set for the second entity, the computer program product further comprising instructions operable to cause a  
25 programmable processor to:

define data included in the unlocked data set for the second entity as locked for all other entities.

56. The computer program product of claim 55, wherein the instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to define data included in the unlocked data set for the second entity as locked for all other entities include instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to define data included in the unlocked data set for the second entity as locked for other entities during a period of time when the second entity has access to the unlocked data set.

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57. The computer program product of claim 40, further comprising instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to:

transmit data from the stored data set to the second entity;

receive modified data from the second entity; and

15 integrate the modified data corresponding to the unlocked data set into the stored data set.

58. The computer program product of claim 40, wherein the instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to define the stored data set to include a locked data set and an unlocked data set include instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to define, based on user input, the stored data set to include a locked data set and an unlocked data set.

59. A computer program product, tangibly stored on a computer-readable medium, the computer program product comprising instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to:

define a master data set in a first entity;

assign permissions, including permission to change data, to a subset of data within the master data set based on predetermined criteria;

transmit a copy of the master data set with indications of the permissions to a second entity; and

receive changes to the master data set in accordance with the assigned permissions.

5        60.      The computer program product of claim 59, further comprising instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to receive a modified copy of the master data set from the second entity and to integrate the modified copy of the master data set with the master data set.

10       61.      The computer program product of claim 60, wherein the instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to receive the modified copy of the master data set include instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to receive additional data.

15       62.      The computer program product of claim 60, wherein the instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to receive the modified copy of the master data set include instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to receive changed data.

20       63.      The computer program product of claim 62, wherein the instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to receive changed data include instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to receive data that has been changed in response to design considerations.

25       64.      The computer program product of claim 59, wherein the instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to assign permissions include instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to assign authority to read data.

65.      The computer program product of claim 59, wherein the instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to assign permissions include instructions operable to

cause a programmable processor to assign authority to change data that is a subset of the transmitted copy of the master data.

5        66.      The computer program product of claim 59, wherein the instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to assign permissions include instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to assign authority to add data.

10      67.      The computer program product of claim 59, wherein the instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to assign permissions include instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to assign authority to delete data.

15      68.      The computer program product of claim 59, wherein the instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to assign permissions include instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to assign authority to access predetermined types of data within the subset.

20      69.      The computer program product of claim 59, wherein the instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to assign permissions include instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to assign permissions based on at least one of an identity of an entity, a function of the entity and a user's position within the entity.

25      70.      The computer program product of claim 69, wherein the instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to assign permissions based on a user's position within the entity include instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to assign permissions according to a hierarchy within a department so that a highest ranking member of a department has a greater number of permissions, and a number and extent of permissions decrease as rank decreases.

71. A computer program product, tangibly stored on a computer-readable medium, the computer program product comprising instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to:

receive, from a first entity in a second entity, a copy of a master data set with permissions for using the master data set, the master data set including locked data and unlocked data;

modify the copy of the master data set according to the permissions and user input; and

transmit a modified copy of the master data set to the first entity.

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72. The computer program product of claim 71, wherein the instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to receive the copy of the master data set in a second entity include instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to receive the copy of the master data set in a computer application.

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73. The computer program product of claim 72, wherein the instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to receive the copy of the master data set in a computer application include instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to receive, in the locked data, version information regarding the computer application and to receive, in the unlocked data, raw data for manipulation.

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74. The computer program product of claim 72, wherein the instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to modify the copy of the master data set include instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to perform design processes on the unlocked portion of the data.

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75. The computer program product of claim 74, wherein the instructions operable to cause a programmable processor to receive the copy of the master data set with permissions for using the master data set include instructions operable to cause a

programmable processor to receive permissions to do at least one of read, change, delete and add data to the unlocked data.

76. The computer program product of claim 71, wherein the instructions operable  
5 to cause a programmable processor to receive the copy of the master data set with  
permissions for using the master data set include instructions operable to cause a  
programmable processor to receive the copy of the master data set with permissions based on  
subsets of the unlocked data, with different permissions assigned for different subsets of the  
unlocked data.

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77. The computer program product of claim 71, wherein the instructions operable  
to cause a programmable processor to receive the copy of the master data set with  
permissions for using the master data set include instructions operable to cause a  
programmable processor to receive the copy of the master data set with permissions based on  
15 at least one of an identity of the second entity, a function of the second entity and a hierarchy  
of users within the second entity.